

Sales and Service Excellence

JUNE 2006

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To Love You

Select Candidates the Smarter Way

Close the Sale With a Proven Process

Jeanne Bliss,
Chief Customer Zealot
for Major Corporations



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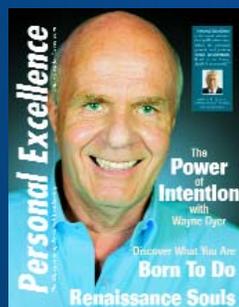
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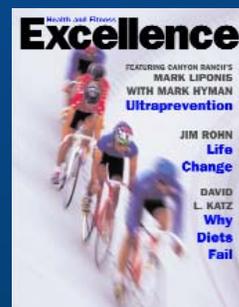
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LEADERSHIP
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Sales and Service Excellence

Volume 6 Number 6

June 2006

Customer Bliss

Do your customers love you?



by Jeanne Bliss

DO YOUR CUSTOMERS LOVE you? Not the ho-hum, “satisfied” kind of love, but love that inspires spontaneous thank-you letters and water-cooler comments like “My new computer is great—I highly recommend it!”

If your customers aren’t feeling the love, you’ve got work to do. Customer love is all about R-E-S-P-E-C-T—which means not forcing them to jump through the hoops created by your silos.

Most companies aren’t structured to act collectively on behalf of customers. People are stuck in their silos making independent decisions, taking isolated actions for the purpose of executing their discipline, achieving good numbers, and earning a good review. Of course, customers don’t drop neatly down each silo; they experience a company horizontally, *across* the silos.

The typical silo structure bumps the customer disjointedly along. This is the breeding ground for the lack of respect customers feel and the discontent they have with us.

If you don’t enthrall your customers—and make them believe you respect them—you’ll lose them. The

good news is you *can* make them love you. It just takes a hefty dose of commitment, energy, and elbow grease.

Ten Tips to Get Started

So, how can you make your customers love you? I offer 10 tips:

1. Eliminate the customer obstacle course. Customers say that the obstacle course for figuring out who to talk to and how and when to get service is



complicated, conflicting, and out of whack. We force customers to try to figure out our organization charts in order to do business with us. Instead of seamlessly executing a customer interaction of placing their first order from start to finish, we deliver discontinuity

in the experience where breaks exist. Sales sells the product, but Operations is not given the specifics of what the customer needs, so what is delivered is off. Who does the customer call? Sales? Operations? Customer service? In these hand-offs, customer failures occur. Simplify the roadmap for customers. Make it clear for them how they can do business with you in a way that is beneficial to them.

2. Stop customer hot potato. He who speaks to the customer first should “own” the customer. There’s nothing worse that sends a signal of disrespect faster than an impatient person on the other end of the line trying to pass a customer off to “someone who can better help you with your problem.” Yeah, right.

3. Give customers a choice. Do not bind your customer into the fake choice of letting them “opt out” of something. Let them know up front that they can decide to get emails, offers, or whatever from you and give them the choice. You may initially build a bigger mailing list by binding customers in with the opt-out policy, but I don’t think it’s something your mom would teach you about respect.

4. De-silo your website. Our websites are often the cobbled together

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parts created separately by each company division. The terminology is different from area to area, as are the menu structures and logic for getting around the site. What's accessible online is frequently inconsistent, as is the contact information provided. Even appearance may vary as strong silos create their own "look," which extends into their section of the website. Depending on what link is clicked, customers feel like they're entering entirely different companies. Figure out collectively what the message is, what the vitals are that you need from customers, and how you will serve them via your website and work to deliver an on-purpose brand experience. Otherwise you'll continue to deliver the defaulted brand experience that's the amalgamation of the site your customers are traversing right now.

5. Consolidate phone numbers. Even in this advanced age of telephony, companies still have a labyrinth of numbers customers need to navigate to talk to someone. All of these grew out of the separate operations deciding on their own that they needed a number to "serve" their customers. Get people together to trim this list and then let customers know about it. This requires the gnarly hard work of collaborating and collective decision making—but get it done already! Customers are fed up.

6. Fix (really) the top 10 issues bugging customers. We have created a kind of hysterical customer feedback muscle in the marketplace by over-surveying our customers and asking (ever so thoughtfully) "How can we improve?" Customers have told us what to do and we haven't moved on the information. You can probably recite the biggest issues right now. Do something about them. Customers read the lack of action as lack of caring and certainly lack of respect. We all over-brain what the customer effort should be. Start by striking these top 10 things from your to-do list.

7. Help the frontline to listen. The frontline has been programmed to get a certain output. Sometimes this means closing the call within a time frame; often it includes some kind of up-sell or cross-sell goal. It may be to meet with a quota of customers in a certain time period. Because we've programmed the frontline, there's a predetermined flow of the conversation that makes it one-sided to the company's advantage. Yet, this is what we've done. We've robotized our frontline to the customer all over the world. Let them be human, give them the skills for listening and understanding and help the frontline deliver to the customers based on their needs. Talk about respect. It is not a myth that if you can solve a customer problem successfully you have built a more profitable customer. Crunch those numbers—maybe it will help you to make your case for the resources, invest-

ment, and commitment required.

8. Deliver what you promise. There is a growing case of corporate memory loss that annoys and aggravates customers every day. A customer calls in a product return and is promised a mailing label that never arrives. An appointment is made for home repair and the workman shows up without the right parts. A promise is made for exceptional extended warranty service, yet the process is sloppy and unwieldy. Customers have to fight their way through the maze just to get basic things accomplished. They're exhausted and annoyed, and they're telling everyone they know. And, oh, by the way, when they get the chance, they're walking.

9. When you make a mistake, right the wrong. If you have egg on your face, for whatever reason, admit it. Then right the wrong. There's nothing more frustrating to customers than a company that does something wrong, then is either clueless about what they did or won't admit they faltered.

10. Work to believe. Little respect remains after you've put customers through the third degree that many experience when they encounter a glitch in your products and services and need to return a product, put in a claim, or use the warranty service. As tempting as it is to debate customers to uphold a policy to the letter of the law, suspend the cynicism and work to believe your customers. Most are going to honestly relay what is happening to them with your product or service. And because of all the "ifs, ands, and buts" in your policies, you've conditioned customers to come in with their dukes up when they have a problem. With good reason. You've programmed your frontline to be cynical of customers by creating policies that protect the corporation from the lack of judgment of the minority. Work to eliminate the question of doubt about your customers' integrity. It will do wonders for the attitude and actions that your frontline brings to their interactions with customers.

You need to rearrange your firm to please your customers rather than forcing them to navigate your organizational chart. Anything else feels like disrespect to customers. Make this your mantra: *Customers defect when the silos don't connect.*

Customers vote with their feet and decide if they will stay or leave based on their perception of how much you value them and how you treat them. Getting customers to love you starts with showing them the respect they deserve by making it a joy to do business with you. SSE

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ACTION: Show your customers respect.

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12 Dumb Things Salespeople Do

Stop making the same, stupid mistakes.



by Jim Meisenheimer

WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES, and some salespeople seem to make a lot of them.

Here's my list of the 12 dumbest things salespeople do:

1. Rely on one relationship to protect your account. Why put all your eggs in one basket—with one person? The bigger the account, the more vulnerable you become. Develop more than one relationship in all your accounts, especially the major ones.

2. Cast your fate with mid-level managers instead of starting with the top gun. If you start at the easiest point of entry and think you can't go over the head of that person, you're doomed. Your first call should be to the CEO or president. Simply ask them, or their assistants, for their help in directing you to the right person.

3. Telling prospects and customers that you're new. Imagine boarding an airplane and hearing the pilot announce that he is new. How does that make you feel? That's how everyone feels! If you are new to sales or are an experienced sales rep just getting started with a new company, think carefully about how you will introduce yourself. Just don't say that you're new.

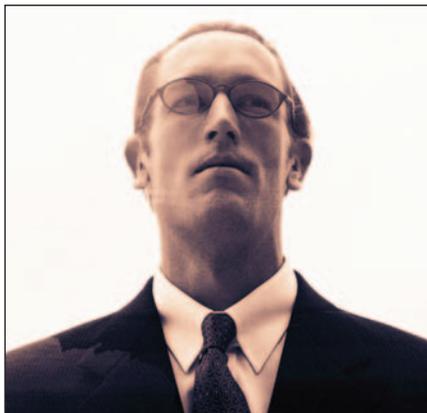
4. Doing price-driven quotes instead of value-structured proposals. If you're in sales you're likely to get requests daily for product quotes. So, you send them a quotation. Then you go ballistic when you lose the deal because you did not have the lowest price. Get out of the quotation business. Do sales proposals. Load them with value. Make your sales proposal scream value and always position a benefits page ahead of your pricing page.

5. Making sales calls like a tourist. Anytime you contact a prospect or customer without written sales call objectives, you are nothing more than a tourist. When you show up planning to "touch base, catch up, check up, and see what's going on," you are wasting time. Your sales call objective could be written as follows: "My objective for this sales call is to establish rapport, build credibility, ask three to five open-

ended questions, identify one common interest we have, and if the person is qualified to secure a confirmed follow-up appointment." Always have written sales call objectives.

6. Getting mugged by your own mouth. If you're not careful with the language you use, you start saying: "I think, can I be honest, can I ask you a question, I know you're busy so I won't take up much of your time, how soon do you need it, I agree with you...but, what do I have to do to earn your business today, so, what do you think, I was wondering." Avoid these phrases! The more you prepare what you'll say and how you'll say it during a sales call, the less likely you'll get mugged by your own mouth.

7. Making the sales call a virtual



improvisation. There are only two types of sales calls: one is prepared, and the other is a total improvisation. Prepare how you call for appointments, deliver your elevator speech, ask open-ended questions, segue into your presentation, deal with price objections, and ask for the order. Prepare, in writing, the words you will use in each key step in your selling process. Preparation always sounds better than improvisation.

8. Forgetting to develop the "Brand Called You." Don't rely completely on the branding of your products and company. Most people don't buy the product or company. Most people buy the relationship with the sales professional working with them. If you want to be remembered you have to be memorable. Marketing will win more sales than selling ever can. Discover

your uniqueness and parade it around your sales territory. Forget about being boring, bland, and benign. Blending in is out! Standing out is in! Seek to be different in a memorable way!

9. Playing the win-lose instead of the win-win game. Never offer a price concession without getting a concession from your prospect or customer. To do so means he wins and you lose. Whenever someone asks you for a better price, ask them for a better deal, which could mean a larger quantity, something else added to the order, or an extended contract. Do you have the courage to do what it takes to make your selling game a win-win game?

10. Putting your families on the veritable back-burner. You may think you'll live forever and that your family members will live for ever. I hope life is long for you and your family. I just don't want you to bank on it. Stuff happens: My first wife Louise died at age 34 from cancer. My brother John died at 46 from a brain tumor. My brother Ray, a NYC fireman, was killed on 9/11 at 46. When you put your family on the back-burner, you risk regretting that you didn't spend more time with them. Make sure every member of your family is on your calendar.

11. Living life in the multi-tasking lane. How many tasks can you do at the same time and do them all exceptionally well? Go figure! Start every day with a written list of what you want to get done that day. Using numbers, prioritize your list. Do one thing at a time. Do the most important thing first. Don't do anything else unless it's more important than the next most important thing on your list.

12. Giving a gazillion people your cell phone number. When you give somebody your cell phone number, you give them permission to call you any time for any reason. I have two cell phones—one in my car and one in my briefcase—and use them exclusively for making outbound calls. You give up control over your life when you give someone else your cell phone number. Stamp on the back of your business card the times when you check your voice mails and e-mails, and tell your customers, except for two or three of your biggest, that you're disconnecting your cell phone number.

We all make mistakes. The good news is you don't have to make the "Dirty Dozen" any more. **SSE**

Jim Meisenheimer is a sales trainer. 800-266-1268, www.meisenheimer.com

ACTION: Stop making these mistakes.

Market with Integrity

Observe three guidelines.



by Alex Wipperfurth

AS MARKETERS, WE OFTEN get so caught up in delivering campaigns for short-term tangible results, we often forget to reflect on the consequences of our activity. We often lack a sense of accountability to a community.

Marketing is not inherently evil. Our craft is creative, artistic, and astute. Its potency brings the world powerful cultural icons and communal experiences that help define who we are today. But, there is great danger in power without responsibility.

Three Criticisms

Critics hit us with three criticisms:

1. Marketing trivializes authentic culture. Critics call it “culture vulturing.” They claim that our prolific use of cultural icons and codes to sell product results in erosion of meaning and significance in our lives. At its worst, culture vulturing co-opts grand issues of social justice just to sell more product. Too often, we try to borrow authenticity rather than earn it.

2. Marketing prioritizes consumption over citizenship. After the tragic 9/11 attacks, President Bush told a nation of anxious Americans to continue spending money. It was a less-than-subtle reminder that our greatest responsibility as Americans is not to vote, but to buy. The products of our marketing-driven economy now create the greatest common bond.

3. Marketing is responsible for youth’s loss of innocence. Critics charge that consumerism is responsible for the early sexualization of today’s youth, as well as their warped values and damaged self-esteem. It’s naïve to ignore the effects of targeting mature products to an immature audience.

How do we break these bad practices? Consumers deserve respect; and respectful marketing works. We need to move back to honest buzz and aim to engage an early market without abusing them.

Three Guidelines

How can we market with integrity? Here are three guidelines:

1. Don’t deceive. Ensure that people are in on the joke, not victims of “roach marketing.” Brands need to be respectful without being boring. All we can do is consider both the short-term consequences and the long-term effects of our decisions, and be wary of any initiative that erodes consumer trust.

2. Don’t intrude. Ads are turning up in coffee cups, bathroom stalls, taxis, and turnstiles. Where to draw the line? How do we determine whether a space is appropriate or sacred? How do we figure out if the message will be welcomed or repelled? To stop the hemorrhaging of the public trust, we must restrain ourselves from invading all public space.

3. Don’t co-opt. Ensure that the cultural equity you attach to your brand

will benefit from your involvement. In approaching communities, brands are better served by positioning themselves as members or participants.

We need to act with heightened awareness and enter into an honest dialogue with our critics, colleagues, and disillusioned consumers. Once we have checked our actions with our internal moral compasses, then we should plunge forward with enthusiasm and daring.

Marketing needs to stay bold, brave, and surprising. It needs to stay effective not by employing deceptive tactics, but by genuinely earning consumer devotion. **SSE**

Alex B. Wipperfurth is a partner at Plan B and is the author of Brand Hijack. Alex@plan-b.biz.

Action: Advertise with integrity.

MARKETING/DISCIPLINE

Culture of Discipline

The scoreboard is not the game.



by Dave Anderson

AS A MANAGER, YOU CAN easily be seduced by numbers people produce if you fail to examine how they get them. So, rather than reflexively applaud those who set new records, determine how they get their results:

1. Are they getting the job done on the backs of other people? Do they intimidate to get results?

2. Do they rely too much on themselves, rather than build a team? If so, their success will fade.

3. Do they work double shifts and never take a day off? If so, they will burnout, plateau, and decline.

4. Do they impose their will on the team through the force of personality? If so, their results won’t be consistent.

5. Are they simply in the right place at the right time? Is the product so hot that it literally sells itself? Once the novelty wears off, demand will drop.

6. Are market conditions so strong that the leader is “drafting” off economic helium? Don’t mistake a bull market for brains. Maintain strict accountability for daily disciplines.

If you just look at the numbers, you’re not looking hard enough. The

numbers are lagging indicators. They show up too late to detect deficient performances that need to be corrected.

It is fine to be a student of numbers, but it’s better to be a student of disciplines, behaviors, and culture because that’s what your numbers depend on. If your people get results by doing the right things, affirm and acclaim them. If not, correct their course.

Also evaluate the performances of your salespeople:

1. Do they get great numbers because they burn through prospects? If so, the moment traffic dies down, they are done.

2. Do they tell customers anything necessary to appease them?

3. Do they produce great numbers because they work long hours? If so, they are headed for trouble at home and are jeopardizing their health.

If these conditions describe the “how” for your people, they will

never achieve consistently spectacular results. As you become a student of discipline, behaviors and cultures, remember: We live in an instant gratification society. Most people want the prize without paying the price. They spend more time looking for shortcuts than developing discipline. They embrace the “get results at any cost” mentality.

Create a culture of discipline to do the right things. You need people who think and act in disciplined ways—people who work in line with the priorities you set and execute them consistently. **SSE**

Dave Anderson is the author of If You Don’t Make Waves You’ll Drown (Wiley). He is a speaker and trainer who once led top national car dealerships. www.LearnToLead.com.

Action: Create a culture of discipline.



I Want to Think About It

Create an auto-response to overcome this objection.



by Brian Jeffrey

IF I HAD A DOLLAR FOR EVERY time I heard the I-want-to-think-about-it put-off, I wouldn't be in sales any longer; I'd be comfortably retired!

As salespeople, we hear this put-off so many times that you'd think we'd be masters at dealing with it, and yet most of us still stammer around and then say something like, "Well, why don't I give you a call next week?"

When we get back to the office, we tell our manager that everything looks good but the prospect wants to think about it before making a decision. When our manager asks what the prospect wants to think about, we say, "I'm not sure," or we make up a story.

There is a better way to deal with this put-off—develop a planned auto-response that kicks into gear the minute we hear "I want to think about it."

Typically the I-want-to-think-about-it put-off comes from one of five sources: 1) the prospect truly needs to think about it; 2) the prospect is concerned about the price or unsure about the value; 3) the prospect is a procrastinator and never makes a fast decision; 4) the prospect has no intention of buying and wants you to disappear; or 5) someone else's approval is needed before moving ahead.

You should uncover Reason 5 during the qualifying process by asking *Who, besides yourself, will be involved in making the final decision?* Failure to ask this question is why many salespeople end up selling to the wrong person.

If I suspect the prospect is using the I-want-to-think-about-it just to get rid of me (Reason 4), I'll sometimes "go-for-a-no." After the prospect tells me they want to think about it, I'll say, "I get the impression you've already decided not to go ahead with this. Am I right?" If the prospect confirms my suspicions, I may ask why, but I don't apply any pressure. Often the prospect will simply tell me the reasons for delaying the decision, and the sales will happen in its own good time.

For Reason 3, find out how much time they need and give it to them.

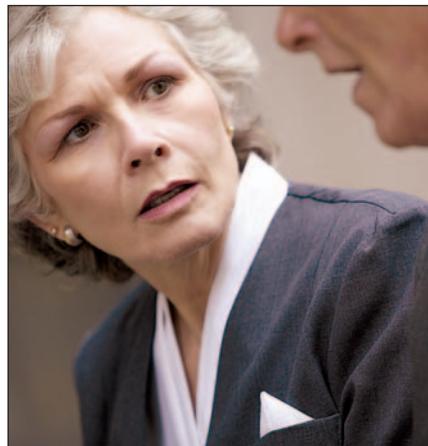
So, that leaves us with Reason 1 and

Reason 2 as candidates for developing an auto-response for. The best way to deal with this put-off is to get prospects to tell you what they want to think about. You need to get them talking about their concerns.

Developing Your Auto-Response

The first part of the auto-response is to acknowledge the prospect's concern. You might show empathy by saying, *"I understand how you feel. If I were in your shoes, I'd probably want to think about it as well."*

The second part depends upon what you think the concerns might be. If you think the stumbling block is price/value, you might ask, *"Tell me,*



are you concerned about the cost?" or *"Is it the cost that's holding you back?"*

If the prospect says, *"Frankly, yes,"* then you know that you are dealing with a price objection, and you'd better give them additional benefits. Or you might review all the ideas opposed to buying and weigh them against the reasons for going ahead. This not only gives the prospect time to think but also makes you look very professional.

If the prospect's reason for wanting to think about it stems from some hidden concern (Reason 1), the best thing you can do is get the concern into the open where you can do something about it. You have to get them talking about it. The same rules apply. The first thing out of your mouth is a neutral acknowledgment followed by something like: *"May I ask what concerns you still have?"* or *"May I ask what's causing you to hesitate?"*

So now our auto-response sounds

like this: *"I understand how you feel. If I was in your shoes, I'd probably want to think about it as well. (brief pause) May I ask what concerns you still have?"*

Sometimes you sense the prospect has positive feelings about your offering but something is stopping them from buying now. You can add a sense of urgency and rekindle their desire for the product/service by having them restate the benefits to you.

After you acknowledge the concern, say: *"Which parts of the proposal do you like best?"* (Then ask, *"Why?"*) or *"How do you see yourself benefiting from our product/service?"* or *"Which benefits do you feel are most important to you?"*

Using this approach, you can often get the prospect to not only sell themselves but also create the sense of urgency to propel the sale to a conclusion.

Give Them Time to Think

A slightly more complicated technique is to create a situation where the prospect has some time to think about it, especially when the sale is moving too fast for your prospects and they're wanting to gain some breathing space or just slow down the sale. It's a five-step process: 1. Suitably acknowledge the objection. 2. Ask, *"How long would you like to think about it?"* 3. After the prospect replies, ask, *"Do you like what you've seen here today?"* If you get a positive answer, ask, *"If you still feel this way in... (length of time), do you think you'll be going ahead?"* 5. If you get a promising response, and if it's reasonable to expect a decision today, delay for 30 to 60 seconds (fill out a form or something). Then ask, *"Do you really want to wait?"* In many cases, the brief delay gives the prospect the breathing space they need and, they will respond positively. If they say they still want to wait, you might respond, *"No problem. When should I give you a call?"*

If you find this step to be pushy, instead of asking, *"Do you really want to wait?"* after the pause, you can either set an appointment, *"Why don't we set up a time for me to follow up with you?"* or combine approaches, *"Why don't we set a time for me to follow up with you or would you prefer to simply go ahead now?"*

You'll hear *"I want to think about it"* many times, so prepare for it now. Write out your response and review it until it becomes your auto-response. **SSE**

Brian Jeffrey, a.k.a. The Sales Wizard, is a sales trainer, sales management consultant, and author specializing in helping salespeople hit their targets. Visit www.SalesForceTraining.com.

ACTION: Prepare your auto-response.

Risk and Return

Tap the power of connection.



by Debbie Bermont

IF YOU WANT BIG SALES results, you have to play big. Often there is a direct correlation between the risk you take and the financial reward you receive. The bigger the risk, the bigger the potential gain—and the potential loss.

What will you risk to gain bigger returns? Some people don't play big because they think about what they might lose, not what they could gain. If you want explosive sales growth, you need to take more risks than someone who wants moderate growth.

Risk is one way of measuring your comfort level. What might seem risky to you might not seem so to someone else. It's all a matter of perspective.

You can increase your comfort zone so that playing big becomes easy. How?

First you must define what *big* means to you. Think about what number would represent explosive sales growth for you in the next 12 months, even if that number makes you feel uncomfortable.

Your current comfort zone is represented by your current level of sales. Whatever you did in your business before today got you to the level of sales you have now. If you continue to do what you have done in the past, you will likely get the same results in the future. If you stay in your comfort zone, you have no reason to move forward. If you want to experience explosive sales in the near future, you must expand your comfort zone consistently. And while you are doing that, you will feel uncomfortable.

If you stay in your comfort zone, your business will stagnate. Being uncomfortable doesn't mean being overwhelmed. Successful people still have fears that could prevent them from moving forward; however, they don't let these fears stop them.

Here's the solution to help you move forward with confidence. Instead of focusing on the end result (your sales goal), you only have to focus on the next step—you just need to get one step closer to achieving your goal. All

you ever need to know from day to day is what you need to take the next step. As you advance forward, your comfort zone will expand, and you will move closer to your goal.

Once you identify your next step, you can find the resources—the answer, information, or training you need. This is the power of connection.

You have always used the power of connection—you just didn't know it. In the past, when you needed to know *how* to do something, you found the help you needed, from taking a seminar, learning on the job, reading a book, or talking to someone else. The connection was *something* or *someone*.

Perhaps you never thought that the answers to get you to where you need to go are so easily in your grasp. You'll find the solution through a competitor, consultant, friend, associate, customer, internet, book or mentor. The resources available to you are unlimited.

You only need to know *what* the next step is you need to take to get you closer to your goal. The *how* is out there. Somewhere, someone has already blazed the trail. They have learned from their experience, and they're willing to share the lessons with you so you too can move forward without making the same mistakes.

You have unlimited help to get you to your next step. You have access to millions of people through phone, fax, and e-mail. Your learning curve can be faster and easier. You can use the *power of connection* 24/7. Now you can think *big*, play *big* and achieve *big sales results*. As long as you have the power of connection, you can move forward! **SSE**

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ACTION: Increase your comfort zone.

MOTIVATION/ADVERSITY

Adversity Gives You Strength

If you learn how to cope.



by John Boe

HOW CAN YOU STAY self-motivated and productive in turbulent times?

How do you persevere as a salesperson when times are tough and customers seem to be backing off in the face of economic uncertainty?

Every challenge, setback, and personal difficulty you encounter in life also brings with it the promise of equivalent or greater benefit! The key to overcoming adversity is to avoid panic and instead, focus on finding the greater benefit. Adversity will never leave you where it found you; it will either strengthen your character or weaken your resolve.

Coping with Adversity

During WW II, the survival rate for younger, presumably more physically fit sailors was remarkably lower when compared to their older shipmates. The older sailors had a much higher survival rate due to the fact that they had overcome more adversity and developed greater confidence than the younger, less experienced sailors.



The head of this research project, Kurt Hahn, was so moved by this discovery that he created the Outward Bound program, utilizing a series of progressively rugged challenges to mentally and physically prepare young sailors to cope with the adversity of combat. Today the Outward Bound program works with troubled youth to help them develop greater confidence.

Sales Perseverance

People faced with similar adversity often experience very different outcomes. Some people become weakened, some become stronger. If you place a carrot, an egg and a coffee bean into a pot of boiling water, each reacts differently: The carrot comes out soft; the egg comes out hardened; while the coffee bean turns the hot water into coffee.

Selling in these challenging times demands determination and personal fortitude. Having the will to persevere when times are tough is a characteristic commonly found among self-made millionaires. Are you a quitter? The last time you failed, did you stop trying because you failed or did you fail because you stopped trying?

Expect to encounter detours, roadblocks, and potholes of adversity. The next time you face adversity, learn from it and know that you are becoming a stronger person because of it! **SSE**

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ACTION: Grow stronger from adversity.

Create Your Position

What do customers think of you?



by Dave Kahle

HIS EYES WERE BLOODSHOT from staying out late and partying heavily the previous night. A two-day-old stubble framed his face. He was wearing a tee shirt, which he hadn't tucked in, a pair of jeans, and scuffed loafers. It was the second day of my Sales seminar, and he was complaining to the group that his customers were only interested in low price.

I wondered: "Do you think your appearance and demeanor have anything to do with it? Do you give them the idea that you are the lowest rung on the pricing scale? Is it possible that you have positioned yourself as the Wal-Mart of the industry?"

I remember, as a child, having a salesperson call on my family to discuss a correspondence course. He drove a big Lincoln, dressed richly, spoke articulately, and carried himself with confidence. We bought his program without quibbling about price.

You always create a position in the minds of your customers, and that position influences the customer's attitudes toward you as well as their buying decisions. If you look like you're the low price, your customers will expect you to be the low price. Consider how you position yourself in the minds of your customers.

Positioning is the place that your brand or product has carved out in the mind of the customer. It's the pictures that enter the customers' mind when they think of your product, the feelings that your product evokes, the attitudes they associate with you, and the thoughts that they have of you. Your sales calls and visits embed a set of expectations, pictures, and emotions into the minds of your customers.

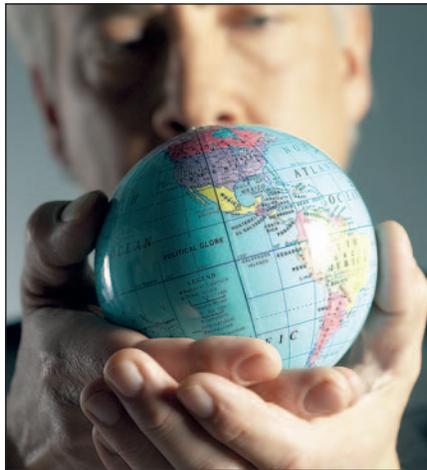
Creating Your Position

What position do you want to create. What do you want your customers to think of you? What is a minimum acceptable position, and ideal position?

The minimum position suggests that your customers view you as a competent, trustworthy person who brings value to them. They believe that you know your products and their

strengths and weaknesses, that you know their issues, and that you can be reliably counted on to do what you say you will do. If your customers don't think of you in this way, you probably should not be in sales.

The ideal position builds on the minimum, but adds a specific understanding on the part of the customer of your unique combination of strengths and attributes. It evolves as you have history with the customer until you occupy a position that is totally and uniquely yours and that carries with it the expectation that your strengths in some specific and unique way add value to the time the customer spends with you. The ultimate test of your



position is the customer's willingness to see you and the resulting preference for doing business with you.

Four Essential Steps

How do you want your customers to think of you? Once you articulate a specific picture, you can then build that position by taking four steps:

1. Soberly assess yourself. What sort of position are you currently occupying in the customer's mind? Be objective as you think through each issue and compare yourself to your competitors. How do you stand on your appearance, product knowledge, understanding of company policies and procedures, sales skills, understanding of the customer, and your bearing and demeanor. If you rank below your competitors on any of these issues, you need to spiff them up so that you can improve your position.

2. Start on the inside. Get grounded. You can't sustain a false position. So, portray yourself to be who you are. Integrity, meaning consistency between who you are and who you present yourself to be, is key to a positive position.

You must clearly understand who you are. That means that you crystallize, in writing, three issues: 1) Your purpose—why are you here? 2) Your vision—what would you like to become? What do you see as possible and ideal? And 3) Your values. What are your priorities? What people, ideas, behaviors, and qualities of character are most important to you?

Once you think deeply about these issues, you'll find it easier to live them.

3. Do a sober assessment of your strengths. To position yourself in the eyes of the customer, you first need to identify your unique strengths. What are your personal unique attributes, experiences, and passions as it relates this job? Do you have some special experience, unique capabilities, unique relationships, or unusual characteristics? Identify those strengths on paper, and then add how each of those can bring value to the customer. You now know who you are and what strengths you can bring to customers.

4. Continually seek opportunities to convey your brand. Act in a way that is consistent with your statements of strengths. For example, if you say that you are good with high tech, don't take notes on a scratch pad. Put them into a PDA. Act like the person you claim to be.

Find ways to utilize your strengths and emphasize your uniqueness.

Develop a reputation by intention. Decide what you want to be known for, and then work to make that happen. One salesperson, for example, won't call on a customer unless he has something of value to share with that customer. As a result, he has no problem getting time with his customers.

If you want to be known as responsive, set up a system that allows you to respond to every call within an hour.

Shape every aspect of your interaction with the customer to match the position you want to gain. If you want your customer to think of you as confident and competent, don't drive a dirty 10-year-old car. If you want to be known as articulate, don't use slang.

Consistently building a positive position will pay dividends for years. **SSE**

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ACTION: Shape your market position.

Three Deadly Words

You need to stop using them now.



by Jill Konrath

IN THE MOVIE, *BEACHES*, Bette Midler's character (who is caught doing something she shouldn't) brassily proclaims, "I didn't know I was doing it, so it doesn't count."

That excuse might work one time, but once someone brings the error of your ways to your attention, you can't continue to make the same mistake.

When you use the three deadly words in your attempts to get into accounts, you create problems for yourself.

1. Leading-edge (state-of-the-art, industry-leading). The moment you start using words like this, you turn into a self-serving salesperson. You may not think so, and it most likely isn't your intent, but that's how your prospect sees you.

Why? Because you're trying to impress her with how wonderful your offering is. The more you brag about your offering, the less believable you are. Even if your product or service is the most advanced, your prospect knows that it's only a matter of months before some other firm has a competitive offering that costs less.

Don't talk about your offering. Leave out all the descriptors that supposedly make it so incredible. Instead, focus on your customer's objectives, challenges, and issues. You need to get them to move off the status quo, and those "bragging" words just don't do it.

2. Partner (partnership). Many well-intentioned sellers insert this word in their initial contacts with prospective clients. They graciously say, "We're looking to partner with ..." Do you know how that's heard by your prospects? It's totally self-serving again. You might as well say, "We're looking to sell lots of our stuff to you, but we don't want to use that awful word because it sounds so crass."

Decision makers don't need another partner. Believe me, they have enough already. Besides, partnerships have to be earned over time. Or they're highly strategic and negotiated at the top. So, don't call up and propose a partnership. Instead talk about the significant

results you can deliver on a high priority business objective.

3. One-stop shopping. Of all the phrases used by sellers today, this one might be the worst. Perhaps your marketing department told you to use it. Or, if you're a small firm, maybe you think it makes you sound big. But often I see sellers use it because they want to make sure their entire offering is on the table in hopes that prospects find something that they need in it.

One-stop shopping is the most trite and overused sales buzz word today. Everyone says it, so it doesn't differentiate you in the least. In fact, it makes you sound like a "Jack of all trades, but a master of none." When prospects hear it, their automatic response is, "Generic Services takes care of that for

us." Done! You're out. You've created your own obstacle.

Rather than talk one-stop shopping, instead hone in on one aspect of your product or service offering. Choose one that may meet their need; address an area where your competitors may be weak; or solve a problem they didn't even know they had.

Don't say the same thing everyone else does. It makes you so easily dismissable. Sure you can learn to handle objections and maybe even recover if you get good at them. But a better solution is to not use words that create problems for you in the first place. **SSE**

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ACTION: Eliminate these words from your sales.

SALES/EGO

Strong Ego

Is it vital in sales?



by Bill Brooks

WHICH TYPE OF EGO IS more destructive—one aimed toward conquest of accounts, assertive behavior to find, sell, and deliver business or one that focuses on internal destruction, empire building, and self-protection?

A strong ego is essential for success in sales and marketing. Here's the rub. An out-of-bounds ego can destroy friendships, relationships, strategies, alliances, careers and companies. Egos alienate prospects and customers!

Egos need to be tempered with a strong dose of intuitive insight, empathy, and diplomacy. Stir in a dose of unbridled arrogance with a lack of any of these four components, and you are looking for trouble.

It takes a strong ego for a salesperson to face rejection, refusal and the rigors of constantly having to persuade someone to your point of view. It takes a strong ego for sales executives to deal with customer problems, pricing, delivery or quality issues and to serve as an advocate for salespeople. By the same token, becoming combative, obnoxious, pushy, offensive or abusive is counterproductive.

There is a significant difference between being assertive and abrasive,

being persistent and being a pest. Your value is in knowing the difference.

How about you? Do you know when a prospect is telling you "I'm not interested?" Or, a co-worker saying, "I get your point, lighten up?"

Six Principles

Practice six principles:

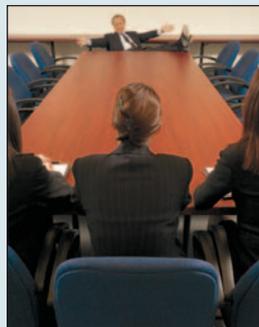
- Sales success depends on finesse rather than power.
- You need to know when to back off and let a co-worker, subordinate, or prospect have a rest from your assault.
- There is a difference between interrupting someone and pounding on them to sell them your product or service and allowing them to step up when they are ready to discuss your idea.
- The tone of your voice, body language and written communication can all help or hinder your positioning.
- People want to do business with people who are competent, punctual, professional and sensitive to their needs.
- Your time schedule may not match that of the other person.

As I reflect on my sales experience, I'm reminded of the situations where I, or others, tried to violate these six principles. These principles hold up.

Yes, your agenda is important to you, just as the other person's agenda is important to them. In sales, you have to meet your prospect far beyond the middle. After all, they are in control. **SSE**

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ACTION: Temper your ego with empathy.



Making It Right

Excel at service recovery.



by Martin Wright and Kelly Nemeth

MISTAKES happen—it's how you fix them that makes the difference.

If your staff members are capable of making all the decisions about caring for patients or customers, why can't they decide how to mend a service relationship gone awry?

At Lexington Medical Center, this idea spawned a revolution. Everyone there has the power to right any wrong done. Anyone can spend the time or money necessary to make a service failure right. Leaders tell staff members: "The only signature you need is your own."

Creating systems to respond to service errors is a best practice. These service recovery systems improve customer and employee satisfaction and enhance financial outcomes by exceeding customer expectations; empowering employees; and reducing complaints, grievances, and lawsuits.

Service recovery is righting a perceived wrong done to a customer. When a customer has a negative service experience, two things can happen:

- If the problem is successfully corrected, the customer will not only return for service but will become a champion for you to friends and family.
- If the service failure is ignored, left unfixed or forgotten, the customer will lose trust, feel hurt and perhaps even attack your reputation.

The importance of patients' responses to errors can't be understated. In the Press Ganey 2005 National Healthcare Satisfaction Report, the No. 1 concern of patients about a hospital is its response to their concerns and complaints—not privacy, tests, treatments, nurses or doctors. Patients need a rapid, empathic and effective response.

Last year, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services set new guidelines for how hospitals handle complaints from patients and family. These guidelines make it clear that patients voicing a concern or a complaint must have their issue resolved. Anyone in a position to respond to such issues has a responsibility to resolve the complaint in a reasonable time frame.

Leaders' Role in SR

Before front-line staff can adopt these techniques, they must see that such efforts are a priority for senior leaders. Employees often tell us that their senior managers tell them what to do, but "they never follow their own orders." Service staff must feel supported in their SR efforts. To engender a commitment to service quality, leaders must do four things:

1. Empower all front-line staff. A service recovery system should empower every employee to right a service wrong. How much empower-



ment? Baptist Health Care allows every employee to spend up to \$250 for service recovery. This money can be used for anything that helps right a wrong, including handing out gift certificates, replacing a lost item, and issuing credit toward a medical bill. Managers trust employees to make the best decision in the eyes of the patient. Simply ask what staff members need—money, authority or resources—to right a wrong. No one knows better how to repair a service failure than the staffperson handling the situation.

2. Model service recovery behaviors. Empowering does no good if leaders aren't role-modeling behaviors. There are many ways to role-model behaviors. Doing things that aren't your job, such as picking up a piece of garbage, demonstrates an above-and-beyond attitude. Mentoring programs provide more formal modeling. Make sure that mentors firmly believe in the facility's quality improvement initiatives and

reward and recognize others for a job well done. Service champions empower front-line staff with real authority.

3. Recognize and reward service excellence. Sometimes, saying "good job" or "way to go" is enough to reward an employee who has successfully dealt with an irate patient. But to be successful in any initiative, your facility must have a formal reward and recognition program for service recovery. Solicit feedback from employees to learn how they would prefer to be recognized and rewarded. Certain things can be done most effectively by upper management. One such thing is rounding, or walking around the hospital, talking to front-line staff about service recovery. Empower your leaders by giving them the right words to say. Often, scripting is imperative to ensure that the correct message is conveyed for a job well done, and that it is consistent with the mission, culture and values.

4. Take part in any cross-functional teams or committees devoted to service recovery. Create a multidisciplinary service recovery team responsible for diffusing service recovery practices. Being a member of a team lets staff members depend on one another and forces responsibility and ownership among peers. Once your service recovery team is in place, the team must conduct a gap analysis, create service standards, develop a model for service recovery, provide tools for staff, and find a method to track complaints for trending purposes. A team's success depends on top leaders who make decisions on what a successful service recovery plan should be as well as buy-in from both managers and front-line staff.

Although things do go wrong, what you choose to do about it reflects your commitment to excellence. Service failures are opportunities to right the wrongs that have been done, to take measures to ensure that the problem never happens again. In this imperfect world, mistakes or missteps happen. But the difference between accepting minor mishaps and creating systems to resolve complaints is the difference between losing a one-time customer and creating a loyal customer for life.

Hire the right people, empower them to make the right decisions for each service recovery opportunity, then reinforce a job well done. **SSE**

*Martin Wright and Kelly Nemeth are consultants with Press Ganey Associates. Nemeth contributed to the book Making It Right: Service Recovery Tools, Techniques, and Best Practices (HCPro).
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ACTION: Engage in service recovery.

Selecting People

Do away with resumes.



by Joseph Murphy

AS A SALES OR SERVICE manager, are you ever frustrated with your recruiting, screening, and selection process, particularly with the way resumes are handled? Resumes often emphasize the wrong data for screening candidates.

Suppose your company's applicant tracking systems (ATS) database averages 1,000 resumes per opening/hire. In most cases, only about 15 percent of the candidates possess the minimal qualifications. The remaining 85 percent of the resumes drain recruiting resources, thus increasing the cost per hire.

The current response is to create more complex methods for searching through resumes and developing more sophisticated ways of discovering candidate-job fit, from data that is of little value for predicting job performance.

ATS and Candidate Relationship Management System (CRM) vendors tout that they can find the needles in the haystack. A better approach is to build a process that only lets needles into your applicant flow, and then helps you find the best needle.

Grasping New Capabilities

I recommend using a combination of screening and assessment.

Screening can be achieved with standardized, scorable questionnaires on work experience, minimum qualifications, specialist knowledge, and biodata. Knock-out factors can help quickly remove those candidates without key qualifications. Self-scheduling software can advance candidates into an on-line or proctored assessment session.

Assessment has evolved into simulated work samples and virtual job tryouts. These methods embed situational judgment, reasoning skills, and workstyle preferences to yield a person-job fit score. Candidates find this approach more engaging and relevant.

Based upon assessment results, recruiters can then invite best-fit candidates to an interview. At this point, the resume becomes a useful context to guide the interview.

Most organizations could free up two days per week per recruiter of resume sifting and phone qualifying work by automating the screening and assessment process that removes the resume from the front end of the process and makes decisions to advance candidates on more objective data. Recruiters would spend little time with candidates until after they had been through four levels of interactive, two-way information sharing. The quality of hire goes up, time-to-fill goes down, and the interview-to-hire ratio drops.

Using the resume as the basis for screening assumes that the experiences listed are the predictors of the best candidates. In fact, experience is proxy data for underlying skills, abilities, and competencies. Experiences listed on resumes are more subjective,

as this data falls prey to inflating experiences and word-smithing (spinning).

The resume paradigm assumes that candidates present their information in a manner that is usable and valuable to the company. The scorable, multi-method screening process gathers information intentionally, based upon predefined information needs. One is hopeful, the other objective. Are your decisions based on objective data?

Simulations, virtual job tryouts, and work sampling are the wave of the future. Should we do away with resumes? No, but we should take a more objective approach to screening candidates. SSE

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ACTION: Screen candidates differently.

SALES/VALUE

Solutions Selling

Try selling value, not price.



by Andrea Sittig-Rolf

WHEN YOU HEAR AN objection to your proposal based on price, you haven't clearly defined the value of your solution. When true value is perceived by the prospect, price becomes a non-issue. So, you need to understand your prospect's hot buttons and decision-making criteria before developing a solution and presenting your proposal.

These eight tips will help you design solutions that will appeal to most of prospects' hot buttons including ROI, profitability, and time and money savings.

- Sell profits; not products and services or features and benefits.
- Show the ROI your solution will provide to your prospect including estimated dollars and time.
- Determine the benefits of your solution and then tie dollars to it. Show a monthly, quarterly, and annual savings your solution will provide prospects.
- Design your proposal around *profit improvement* and include information that shows your proposal turns your solution into dollars.



- Show the sacrifice your prospect will make by not implementing your solution—paint a worst case scenario.
- Compare the one-time investment of your solution to the long-term savings your prospect will enjoy.
- Come up with a payment plan to make your solution more affordable to your prospects and offer a discount for pre-payment.
- Become a problem-solver and solution provider for prospects and clients.

Don't let a proposal out the door without a section that addressed the ROI your solution provides. When you can show that the benefit or results of your solution outweigh the investment, you are selling value, not price and you will win every time.

Three Hot Buttons

Here are three common hot buttons:

1. **Sales training that changes behavior.** Allow sales reps to internalize the new techniques by practice and repetition to form proactive selling habits.
2. **Atmosphere that promotes learning.** The experience is fun, yet requires actual prospecting activity from the sales reps the day of the training.
3. **Return-on-investment is important.** Show that clients get many more times back in revenue what they invest in the program. SSE

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ACTION: Sell the ROI of your solution.

How to Craft a Winning Speech

Apply three principles and six practices.



by Andrew B. Wilson

HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP the topic for a speech—whether you're speaking at your local club or to colleagues at work?

Before I share some tips from my experience in writing for CEOs, I'll remind you of a speech that happens to be one of the most important speeches of the 20th century. It may not have caused the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. But it was prophetic in anticipating those events.

I am talking of the speech that President Reagan gave in West Berlin in 1987, two and a half years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. A few weeks before the President was to speak at an event commemorating the city's 750th birthday, Peter Robinson, Reagan's speechwriter, went to Berlin, to gather information. The first person he went to see was John Kornblum, the ranking U.S. diplomat in Berlin. Kornblum advised: "Don't let Reagan bash the Soviets. Don't mention the wall. Berliners have gotten used to it." Later Robinson joined a dozen or so West Berliners for dinner. He asked them, "Is it true, you've gotten used to the wall?"

There was stunned silence. Then—pointing toward the wall—one man said, "My sister lives 20 miles in that direction, but I haven't seen her for two decades. Do you think that I can get used to that?" Finally, an elegant-looking woman—who was angered by the question—told the speechwriter: "If this man Gorbachev is serious with his talk of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, he can prove it. He can get rid of this wall."

And there was the inspiration for one of the great lines in oratory. Reagan said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." When Robinson and his boss showed the speech to the President, he said he liked it, especially the passage about tearing down the wall. But the top people in the State Department and the National Security Council hated the speech—especially the idea of challenging Gorbachev to tear down the wall. They did everything they could to kill the speech—sending one alternative

draft after another. Reagan rejected them all. And he went on to give what was truly a great speech.

Three Cardinal Principles

Here are three cardinal principles:

1. Speak from the heart, as Ronald Reagan did. Talk about the things that you really know and care about. The best speeches spring from a deep sense of conviction. They have a point of view. They don't fudge.

2. Don't shy away from conflict. Conflict and resolution are the central elements in storytelling and all forms of dramatic expression—including speeches. Even in the standard wedding speech, the father of the bride



addresses the tug in the heart that is felt when young people go off and raise families of their own.

3. Get inside the minds of the audience. Speak to their needs and concerns or to their shortcomings or failings. People will accept criticism, but they don't want to be "finessed." If anything, they want to be reminded of what it is to be a human being, and excited by the sense that that is something special—just like anyone who opens a book or goes to a play or movie for more than pure escapism.

A good speech starts with choosing the right topic for the audience you are addressing. Reagan chose to speak about freedom—and how real freedom is incompatible with keeping people trapped behind a wall.

The word "topic" comes from the Greek *topos*, meaning a place, a commonplace, or a common theme. In corpo-

rate speeches, the same topics—teamwork, leadership, globalization, diversity, and ethical decision-making—come up again and again. What of yourself you put into these commonplaces—along with how you relate to an audience—makes the difference between a dull speech and a great speech.

Different Techniques

Beyond these principles, here are six techniques—some tricks of the trade—that are useful in thinking through a speech from start to finish.

1. Open with a bang. Don't waste time on niceties. Aim to capture the audience with your first words when everyone is paying attention.

2. Tell stories and look for ways to build suspense. You might build suspense by creating a potential disaster and delaying the moment of truth.

3. Write for the eye, the ear, the nose, and all the senses. In other words, be as vivid as you possibly can. Create word pictures. CEO John McDonnell did when he likened the C-17 to a wayward youth who totaled the family car not once, but ten times.

4. Create a plot just as you would if you were writing a short story. Most plots have a protagonist and an antagonist—a good guy and a bad guy. Even if the battle is between different ideas or belief systems, think of ways of humanizing or personalizing the conflict, as Reagan did when he addressed the Soviet president by name, saying "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall."

5. Show first, then tell, using examples and stories that lead (through twists and turns) to a few easily stated and readily understood conclusions. In composing a speech, think of yourself as narrator as well as orator. Narration is the art of linking one story to the next and one lesson to another, so it all fits and comes together in the end. The narrator turns drama and surprise into inevitability and closure.

6. In ending a speech, hark back to the beginning—giving the audience a satisfying sense of coming full circle. At the same time, you want an ending that is forward-looking and uplifting—one that offers resolution, or the hope of resolution, to the conflict or crisis that you have addressed.

I hope that I have given you something you can put to use as you become a better speaker and leader. **SSE**

Andrew B. Wilson is a professional speechwriter. This article is adapted from his speech to the Toastmasters Leadership Institute Maritz Company. 314-822-2534, abwilson@swobell.net.

ACTION: Improve your next speech.

Promotional Marketing

Increase brand equity.



by Tom Gegax

IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE market share you think you deserve, examine your marketing and close the gap between where you are and where you want to be. Marketing is the only way to pull potential customers toward you and pass them to sales and customer service.

Five steps create big-league recognition and market share:

1. Differentiate. Most differentiation decisions focus on where you want to land on the price-quality-service continuum. One position isn't necessarily better than the others, but you need to make a choice. A hybrid position is "low-price, nicer experience." Look at Target Corp., Best Buy, IKEA, JetBlue, and Kohl's. Early on at Tires Plus, this is how we differentiated ourselves.

Also, look at sub-categories to create a "nested niche"—a niche within a niche. To maintain market share, FedEx created sub-niches—various pricing and delivery options, extended hours, and convenient drop-off locations.

2. Put your identity on the couch. Each exposure to a strong brand—a succinct, powerful name; a memorable tag line; a bold logo (think Nike swoosh)—cements your market position and produces free advertising. The name Tires Plus told people exactly what we did. Our tag line—*Warehouse Prices. World-Class Service*—told them exactly what to expect. Any time people heard either, our brand message was reinforced.

3. Tie your offering to your point of differentiation. Never stray from your differentiating factors. Continually scrutinize your offering. Studying your competitors' offerings provides perspective on how to optimize your strengths and neutralize theirs. Look at your products and services through your customers' eyes. Ask yourself, *If I was happy doing business with one of my competitors, what would it take to get me to switch? Price? Speed? Service? Warranty? All of the above?*

4. Promote, promote, promote. You may have great products, people, prices, hours, and location, but you still need to get your message out.

Even if you are caught in a budget bind and your resources are slim, you need to find a way to juice up your promotional wattage to achieve top-of-mind awareness in the marketplace. Here are six promotion pointers: 1) Clarify your objective—if you met with all your customers at once, what would you tell them? 2) Preach to the choir—aim most of your ad budget at current customers; 3) Track the metrics—it takes three or more exposures to a message to prompt action; 4) Match the new kid's noise level—don't let a new competitor or current foe who is touting a new product out-gun you; 5) Communicate internally—create internal excitement; 6) Build an online colossus. Every aspect of your

website should reflect your brand.

5. A word to the wise—merchandise. Provide a feel-good experience. Comfort is important. Emotions and feelings often drive purchases. An intuitive shopping experience is a huge differentiator. Anticipate questions. At Tires Plus, guests browsed displays that laid out our products and services alongside features, benefits, and prices. These quick-glance visual answers empower customers to move along in the sales process without feeling any hard-sell pressure from salespeople. **SSE**

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ACTION: Promote your brand.

MARKETING/STRATEGY

Winning at Business

You need a marketing game plan.



by Charlie Cook

DO YOUR VARIOUS marketing pieces and activities work together to generate leads and sales?

To win at business, you need to know the rules of the game, have a clear strategy and track your progress.

Rules for Winning

Here are some rules to follow to succeed at marketing:

1. Written goals are motivating. Define your objectives for revenue, lead generation and conversion rates for the year and quarter. Next list the daily tasks needed to reach your goals.

2. The more qualified prospects you can attract, the more clients you'll have. A clearly defined lead generation strategy will bring in the new prospects you need to be profitable.

3. It's easier to convert prospects to clients when they are looking to solve a problem. Instead of seeking prospects, prompt them to look for you.

4. You'll get a better response from marketing messages that are focused on client problems and concerns, not on your credentials or descriptions.

5. Integrate your tactics and message across your marketing materials, ads, and web site to prompt people to

seek you out and contact you.

6. Your web site must generate leads. Once you have a lead you can use it to generate sales. Once you get prospects to your web site or reading your materials, prompt them to contact you.

7. Most sales are the result of a relationship based on your credibility and the value of your products or services. These relationships can take months to build. Your marketing strategy should facilitate building relationships, with multiple opportunities for contacting prospects.

8. The easiest people to sell to are past customers. Prompt first-time clients to buy from you again.

Keeping Score

To know if your marketing is working you need ways of keeping score. Which marketing results are you tracking? Which ones should you track?

Keep track of these important scores to evaluate your marketing:

1. How many prospects seek your firm monthly? Is this number growing?

2. What percentage of people who see your ads, web site and marketing materials give you their contact info?

3. How many people are on your house list of qualified prospects? How fast is this list growing each month?

4. How many buy from you weekly? What is the dollar volume of each sale?

5. How many sales come from repeat customers?

When you have a game plan, know the rules and track your scores, you can find ways to improve your marketing. **SSE**

Charlie Cook, helps service professionals and business owners attract more clients and be more successful. Visit www.marketingforsuccess.com

ACTION: Track your marketing results.



Ask for the Order

Have a proven process to close the sale.



by Roy Chitwood

AT MY COMPANY, ONE area of selling generates more interest in our services than any other. It's the same area that drives sales management crazy and leaves many salespeople perplexed. That area? Closing. For some reason people believe closing effectiveness is the only secret to sales success. Closing is important, but no more so than the steps before it—approach, qualification, agreement on need, sell the company, fill the need—and the one step after it: cement the sale.

Low-producing salespeople not only lack a proven, effective process to close the sale, but they also don't effectively "open" the sale through rapport, qualification, and agreement on need. Salespeople who rarely ask for the order may be timid, unsure of when to ask, or fear rejection. Personally, I've never understood the fear of rejection in selling because the prospect is not rejecting the salesperson personally, simply saying "no" to the proposal.

Studies show that 62 percent of all salespeople never try to close the sale by asking for the order. How can they sell their product or service if they don't ask for the order? Imagine how effective these salespeople would be if they asked for the order even once.

Closing Process

My closing process serves the prospect without manipulation. When used properly, it increases the odds that the salesperson will close in the first or second try; helps the salesperson avoid a high-pressure situation that jeopardizes the sale; and offers the flexibility of closing several times professionally without antagonizing the prospect.

The closing process is as simple as this: "If we can (state action to be taken), can you think of any reason why we shouldn't (summarize desired commitment)?"

That's it! No trickery or gimmicks. No high-pressure or rambling prose. This close will work comfortably regardless of the salesperson's and prospect's personalities. It's suitable whether the salesperson is asking for

the order or another act of commitment.

After the words, "If we can," the salesperson should give a brief summary of the action to be taken—set price, agree to next meeting date, etc.

After the words, "can you think of any reason why we shouldn't," the salesperson has asked the prospect to make a positive decision to buy or commitment to act now. The sale has been closed!

But be aware of words and phrases that aren't part of this request. For example, a salesperson should not use words such as "now," "today," or "right away." Words and phrases that urge direct action change the close from low- to high-pressure.



Other negative-impact words include "sign" (we've all heard the admonition, "Never sign anything!") and "cost" (the prospect feels they're losing rather than gaining).

We've discussed what the close doesn't say, so let's look at what it does say. The word "we" reinforces the concept that the salesperson and prospect are working together.

Next, the word "think" focuses the prospect on his or her thinking, rather than objections. The most important aspect is the negative question you ask. "If we can ... can you think of any reason why we shouldn't," doesn't ask the prospect to buy, but rather if he or she can think of any reason not to.

If you have done a proper job helping prospects, the answer expected is "no." It's easier for people to say "no" than "yes." But in this instance, when the prospect says no, it means that he or she has just bought.

Prospects have encountered incompetent and ineffective salespeople in the past and have become comfortable in saying no to them. Thus, you extend a simple invitation to say what they are most comfortable saying—no.

Realistically, however, at the moment of decision, some prospects experience fears, uncertainties, and doubts (FUDs). These can be traced back to areas of the salesperson's presentation that the prospect was not satisfied with. In a way, the FUDs serve as a "report card" on how the salesperson has performed. The salesperson should acknowledge the objection by saying: "I see," "I understand," "I can appreciate that."

That should be the extent of the response. You should never react to the prospect by arguing but by empathizing with the prospect's concerns. After doing so, you should get back to selling, offering the prospect additional reasons to buy your product.

This constitutes the *second close*. It goes like this: Acknowledge the objection, re-establish your areas of agreement, add a new feature/benefit/reaction sequence, and ask for the order again.

What happens when prospects object again? Many times they don't reveal the real reason for holding back. Some buyers reject any first offer. Your goal is to get to the real objection (the *third close*). Acknowledge the objection, re-establish your areas of agreement, uncover the real objection, handle the real objection, add a new feature/benefit/reaction sequence, and ask for the order again.

To uncover the real objection, you must ask the prospect: "There must be something you don't like. Would your mind tell me what it is?" This shows your sensitivity, understanding and that you are seeing the situation through the prospect's eyes. It should also uncover the real objection.

For the *fourth close*, you acknowledge the objection, cite the penalty for not buying or acting now, add a new feature/benefit/reaction sequence, and ask for the order again.

In the *fifth close*, you acknowledge the prospect's objection and try a creative close. You may offer a compromise, discount, free trial, or zany close. The sequence is flexible, and you may want to use the fourth or fifth close earlier.

This closing process will work for you and any salesperson. **SSE**

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ACTION: Ask for the order and close.

Employee Loyalty

It drives customer loyalty.



by Jay Forte

CUSTOMER LOYALTY IS THE backbone of successful enterprises. Loyal customers advance both the suppliers' and customers' businesses; they partner for mutual success, and they are less expensive to maintain. So, why is it so difficult to create loyal customers?

Generally it is because management has not established a core culture that encourages exceptional employee loyalty. Loyal customers are created by loyal employees. And employee loyalty must be a management priority.

Most businesses are service-related, and a service business requires each person to respond creatively and intelligently to each service event. Great companies rely on the passionate, intelligent performance of their employees. The more dynamic, creative and innovative their thinking, the greater the ability to impress customers and move them from satisfied (they may come back) to loyal (they will come back).

Sadly, only 18 percent of all employees are actively engaged, connected, loyal—meaning they contribute their most dynamic and innovative responses to create customer loyalty.

Customer loyalty is based first on employee loyalty, and yet 75 percent of employees do not feel loyal to their companies. We know that the greatest value of our employees is their thinking and passion—and they control how much of it they share at work. So, the best way to achieve greater customer loyalty starts first with creating a dynamic and engaging culture.

What helps create loyal employees? Consider these three perspectives:

- **Employees are hired for and allowed to use their talents in their role.** All employees feel more competent and productive when using their natural abilities. Spending time with employees to clearly define their talents and then customizing jobs to include them helps employees feel more connected, interested, and competent in their roles. This engagement shows itself in the extra effort and

greater responses with customers.

- **A strong employee-focused culture exists.** The core is the *employee-focused framework* or the support network in the culture. It is the behavior of managers that shows an employee that he is an asset of the company, worthy of investing in. Here are some things that encourage greater engagement: a shared vision and mission, clear goals and strategies, a professional selection process, a dynamic orientation process, a fair reward and incentive process, a fair performance review and feedback process, regular training, career development, and visible succession planning. Organizations that create a partnership relationship with their employees greatly improve their response to customers.

- **Each employee has a strong relationship with his or her manager.** Managers influence employee performance and retention. Interactive managers care about their people, focus on helping them continually perform at their best, provide consistent performance-based feedback, reward fairly and competitively, and develop continually. The employees now feel that the firm is worthy of their extra effort and loyalty.

Customer loyalty starts with employee loyalty. Employees control their effort, but you can provide the incentive for this effort to be exceptional. **SSE**

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ACTION: Boost employee loyalty.

SALES/GAPS

Sales Performance

Improve your average reps.



by Tina Teodorescu

WE SEE TOP-PERFORMING and low-performing sales reps everyday. Most managers attribute the exemplary performance of top people to nature: "He's a natural," they say. Or, they state that "sales is an art," implying that salespeople either have it or they don't and their performance can't be developed.

While some people are naturally better salespeople, I believe there is a great potential for improvement.

If 10 percent are exceptional, 70 percent average, and 20 percent marginal, the potential for improving the performance of average performers is huge—not to mention the potential for improving the bottom line. In fact, a 5 percent performance gain from the average salespeople yields 70 percent more revenue than a 5 percent shift from the top 10 percent!

What causes the gap between the top and average performers? What stands in the way of leveraging the potential of the average performers? How can you systematically close the gap between the top and average performers?

Many salespeople are simply "winging it" because they have no clearly defined structure or standard sales

process. "Winging it" translates into vast variability in performance and unrealized potential.

By "codifying" top performance into a roadmap with measurable milestones and clear guideposts describing *exactly how to be successful*, you can stop winging it, close the gap, and enable your average performers to produce at higher levels consistently.

Codify Top Performance

To codify top performance and close the gap, first assess what critical outputs at each stage of the sales process top performers within each job title are producing. Next, identify the best practices and key tasks contributing to each milestone. These critical outputs or milestones, key tasks, and best practices are the "code" for sales success.

Next compare that map to the outcomes achieved by average performers during the same timeframes—the gap. After you identify the roadmap to success for

top performance and the gap between top and average performers, you can systematically build a system to support, track, and maintain improved performance among the average performers, decrease the variability in sales performance, and harness the potential for improving the bottom line. This roadmap enables average performers to achieve larger goals, thus closing the gap.

The "art of top performance" can be translated into a science of success. **SSE**

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ACTION: Bring up average performers.



Personal Selling 101

Ten basic selling commandments.



by Robert Michael Fried

NOTHING REALLY HAPPENS in business or in life until somebody sells something! We have to sell our products, services, and programs to customers and maybe even a new concept or two to our boss, just to stay ahead of the game. Most companies offer their sales force on-going training to improve their selling skills and learn new ways to overcome objections to close the sale. Unfortunately, most people never get to take these sales training programs.

So, we have trouble selling ourselves—our own goals, dreams, and aspirations—to others. Even the most creative people (artists, actors and musicians) find it uncomfortable to hawk their personal talents to others. They have agents and business managers. But even starving artists have to sell something sometime. To some extent, we all are required to be salespeople if we hope to succeed.

You don't have to become another Dale Carnegie or Zig Ziglar, but you do need to learn how to sell yourself.

Ten Basic Commandments

Here are 10 basic selling commandments that you can use to sell yourself:

1. Sell your value. People need to buy into you before you can sell them anything. If you can't sell yourself, you'll have trouble selling your personal goals, dreams, and aspirations to somebody else. We all need to do some personal brand-building. We need to let potential buyers know we are a person of value before we can sell them valuables. We need to convince them that we are a trusted ally.

2. Set quantifiable goals. Goals are dreams with deadlines attached to them. Goals are always quantifiable. There always needs to be time and numbers attached to your goals. You might want to sell your book manuscript to a major publisher. You might want to finish the three songs of your demo CD by January of next year. You might want to sell your home over the next six months. Write your goals down and stay focused on achieving them in the designated timeframe.

3. Visualize your success. An effective part of succeeding in sales is putting yourself in the proper mindset to succeed. In order to reach a goal, you must first visualize the end result. Make "mental rehearsals," thereby scripting yourself for success.

4. Shut up and listen. If you want to sell something, you need to become a good listener. This means listening intently to understand the true needs and wants of your prospective buyers. Don't interrupt and talk over the buyer's voice. You'll usually need to ask three to eight good exploring questions of the buyer before you can understand the objections that you'll face in the selling process. Clarifying



the needs of your customer is the initial step in eventually closing the sale.

5. Turn No into Yes. Objections are part of the selling process. Think of the "no's" as a mere gateway to a "yes." The average customer will say "no" between about five times before saying "yes" in any transaction. The key is not to become unraveled when you hear objections. Listen carefully and objections will bring you one step closer to the real needs of your customer—one step closer to a "yes."

6. Think big! It takes the same time and effort to go after big things as it does small sales, so why not reach for the stars? FedEx chairman Fred Smith thinks big. He also knew how to sell himself. While a student at Yale, Smith wrote a term paper proposing a unique global freight and delivery system. He thought the behemoth US Postal Service was ripe for the taking.

As it turned out, Smith was right. He founded FedEx, today the world's largest package delivery company.

Don't be afraid to go after the big fish!

7. Sell the sizzle—not the steak.

Don't start a presentation by trying to sell the nitty-gritty nuts and bolts. Sell the end benefit. You sell a sailboat by helping the customer visualize themselves sailing. When Apple founder Steve Jobs was trying to recruit John Sculley, the president of PepsiCo, he appealed to Sculley's higher sense of purpose: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want to change the world?"

8. Persevere! Succeeding in sales or in life has a lot to do with your tenacity and perseverance. The arrow that hits the bulls-eye is the result of 100 misses. Most famous people had to persevere to realize their goal. Winston Churchill was the odds-on favorite to become prime minister in his early thirties, but did not secure the position until age 66. A newspaper editor supposedly fired Walt Disney because he "lacked creativity." Martin Luther King Jr. was told by his grade school teacher that he lacked the passion to inspire people.

9. Always be closing (ABC). In life and business, you have to ask for the order. You have to seal the deal. You need to ask somebody to sign on the dotted line. The worst that can happen is that you'll get an objection, or a "no" which is really a gateway to a "yes." Here are four time-honored closing techniques that you can apply: 1) alternative close—Would you like me to mail my demo CD directly to your office or hand-deliver it? 2) assumptive close—Will that be cash or credit card? 3) preference close—Would you like that in green or red? 4) Trial close—If I had it in green, would you want it? And 5) authoritative close—If you just authorize this, we can deliver this today.

10. Don't be afraid to fail. Part of the selling process is not being afraid to fail. Even the best salespeople get turned down seven out of ten times. Don't take the "no's" personally. As the song says, "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again." You are going to fail at times, but you can't permit fear of failure to stymie your efforts to reach your goals. As legendary basketball coach John Wooden put it, "The man who is afraid to risk failure seldom has to face success." **SSE**

Robert Michael Fried is a marketing executive who has worked with Motorola, Revlon, Eddie Bauer, Laura Ashley and other known brands. He is the co-founder of the ThirdWind Company.

ACTION: Practice selling yourself.

Seven Touchpoints

Avoid miscommunication.



by Nancy Friedman

I'M SURE THAT YOU HAVE experienced some miscommunication in your life and work. Today there are seven Touch Points of Communication: Email, voice mail, regular mail, phone, fax, face-to-face and instant messaging.

Of these seven ways we communicate, three are synchronous (instant), and four are asynchronous, meaning we wait for an answer.

Touch Point 1: The Telephone and cell phone. More than 80 percent of all transactions involve a phone call. The telephone is synchronous, meaning you're in sync with the person. You have a simultaneous two-way exchange of information. You may not agree with the person, but you can communicate immediately and hear tone of voice. When you hear, your imagination takes over. No sight. Just sound.

The telephone is a most effective and popular method of communication (providing you reach the called party). You can get answers quickly and respond rapidly. The telephone is also good for leaving messages that don't need an immediate answer. If you need immediate action, try to reach another person.

Touch Point 2: Email. This method of communication is asynchronous, meaning you communicate one at a time and may not get an immediate response. And with email, you relinquish interpretation of the tone of voice to the other person. Email can sit for hours, sometimes days, without an answer.

Be careful in your emails. Many hurt feelings come about due to insensitive writing. Practice using "please," "thank you," and "you're welcome." Terse, one-word answers might be perceived as 'rude.' Again, keep it short, sweet and to the point. Use your manners.

Touch Point 3: Voice Mail. Again, voice mail is asynchronous. You can leave a voice mail for someone and when you get an answer, if ever, it's up to that person, not you. It's not instantaneous. So, your voice mail needs to be special. When you leave a voice mail, make it a great one. Remember,

you get to use your tone of voice. That's a real plus. The called party can hear the laughter, the smile, and the tone. Use it to your advantage. Messages that are received in an upbeat, positive tone are returned faster.

Touch Point 4: Letters. Letters are still a great method of communication. But like emails, your letters can be misconstrued. Just be careful with the written word. Keep in mind how miscommunication might occur. We all have stories of miscommunications that have come back to haunt us.

Touch Point 5: Fax. Again, you send and wait for an answer. For those who still use the fax, one-pagers are appreciated. And written words need to be double-checked to be sure it won't be miscommunicated.

Touch Point 6: Face-to-Face. When

we communicate face-to-face, we have it all: Sight, sound, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, the entire package. It is the ultimate synchronous touch point. A hug or handshake can make it all worthwhile. And yet, somehow we still miscommunicate.

Touch Point 7: Messaging. You can combine this method with a phone call. All the same "niceties" of "please," "thank you" and "you're welcome" need to be applied. Instant Messaging can be bolstered at times with a follow-up phone call.

Follow my simple, yet effective, guidelines and you'll be known for understanding and being understood. **SSE**

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ACTION: Follow these guidelines.

SALES/TRAINING

Motivate Change

Why training doesn't work.



by Chris Lytle

AS A PROFESSIONAL speaker, I have often looked into vacant, bloodshot eyes of audience members who have spent the night before partying and yet miraculously managed to make it to my 9 a.m. session. Sometimes I have looked only at their eyelids. Most attendees are ill-prepared to capture, let alone internalize, the content presented. In fact, most people leave the meeting without having captured the new content or learned new skills—let alone having an action plan for implementing the new knowledge and skills.

The Secret of Motivation

Permanent change is the result of a coaching process—not a training event. Here is secret of motivation: *Closing a sale is the most motivating thing that can happen to a salesperson.*

You've seen the swagger of a salesperson who has just landed a big order. There's nothing anyone can say to them in a speech or training session that can take them to that level of motivation. Chanting won't get them to that level of motivation. Making affirmations won't either. There's always the

fire walk. See if the term "energized incompetence" or "zeal without skill" describes your salespeople after they attend a motivational speech.

Make sure that your salespeople have the knowledge and skills required to sell. That means getting face time with decision makers, preparing professionally, approaching and involving the potential customer, asking questions and knowing what to do with the answers, making compelling presentations, and securing the order. There are no short cuts.

Job clarity and achievement are two powerful motivators. When salespeople know what to do and, then, achieve on the job, they become motivated.

You hold a sales meeting in order to get new information to the team so that they will change their behavior when they go back to the field. Here are three axioms to guide your learning initiatives in sales and service: 1) education without action is entertainment; 2) to know and not to do is not to know; and 3) an education initiative that doesn't change behavior is useless.

Change rarely occurs at an event. If you're serious about improvement, describe to each salesperson—in behavioral terms—what you want him or her doing more of or less of. Then measure and coach that new behavior weekly. **SSE**

Chris Lytle is the best-selling author of The Accidental Salesperson. You can get a pre-publication copy of his new book The Wake Up Call (as an e-book) by e-mailing him at chris.lytle@apexperformancesystems.com.

ACTION: Coach your sales force.

